



# The Diamond Cutter Sutra

## *Vajrachedika*

## History

Buddha once dwelt in Anathapindika's Park, in the Jeta Grove at Sravasti, with 1,250 monks and many [Bodhisattvas](#). Near dawn, Buddha clothed himself, took up his bowl and entered the great city of Sravasti to collect food offered as alms. Having returned and eaten, Buddha put away his bowl and cloak, bathed his feet, and sat with legs crossed and body upright upon the seat arranged for him, mindfully fixing attention in front of himself. Many monks approached Buddha, showing great reverence, and seated themselves about him.

A monk called Subhuti arose from his seat in the midst of the monks and, showing great respect for Buddha, said: "It is wonderful how much Buddha has helped the Bodhisattvas. How should men and women who set out on the Bodhisattva Path progress, and how should they control their thoughts?"

## Lead all beings to [nirvana](#)

Buddha replied: "Listen carefully. All Bodhisattvas should hold this thought: Every kind of created being which can be called a 'being', egg-born, formed in a womb, born from moisture or produced by metamorphosis, or with form or without, all these I guide towards Nirvana even though no being at all has been led to Nirvana.

"Why? If in a Bodhisattva the conception of 'being', 'egotistic entity', 'personality' or 'separate existence' should take place, this Bodhisattva would not be an authentic being of wisdom and compassion.

## Practice virtue

"A Bodhisattva should practice virtue without regard to appearances, unsupported by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations or mental attachments. A Bodhisattva should practice virtue without attachment to externals. Why? This is the way to being Buddha."

## [Tathagata's](#) phenomenal attributes

Buddha then asked Subhuti, "But what do you think? Can the Tathagata be recognized by any phenomenal attribute?"

"No, Buddha. Why? Because the Tathagata has taught that the possession of phenomenal attributes is in fact non-possession of any phenomenal attributes."

Buddha elaborated: "Where there is possession of phenomenal attributes, there is delusion; where there is non-possession of any phenomenal attributes, there is no delusion. The Tathagata is therefore recognized by the attribute of having no phenomenal attributes."

## Ask about future

Subhuti then asked Buddha: "In the future, in the last five centuries when the way is obscured, will any beings understand the truth of these teachings?"

Buddha answered: "Do not say this, Subhuti! Even then, in the remote future, there will be beings who will understand the truth when these words are taught. There will even then be Bodhisattvas meritorious in conduct, practised in virtue and full of wisdom who will understand the truth when they hear these teachings. Such Bodhisattvas, Subhuti, will not have honoured one Buddha alone, nor will they have rooted their merit under just one Buddha. Rather, these Bodhisattvas, who will find serene faith awakened upon hearing the words of this teaching, will have honoured and rooted themselves in merit under countless Buddhas. They are known to the Tathagata through his Buddha-thought; they are seen by the Tathagata with his Buddha-eye. Hence they are fully known to the Tathagata, and they will all acquire and produce inestimable merit.

"And why? Because, Subhuti, these Bodhisattvas will have no perception of an egotistic self, neither of a separate entity nor of a soul, no perception of a personality. Nor will they even have a perception of [dharma](#) or [adharma](#), for in them there will be neither perception nor non-perception.

## Explain dharma

"How can this be? If these Bodhisattvas, Subhuti, should perceive either dharma or adharma, they would think of an ego, a separate entity, a soul or a personality. Therefore the Tathagata has taught this saying with a hidden meaning: 'Those who know that the teachings about dharma are like a raft, should renounce dharma and, even more, renounce adharma.'"

Buddha asked: "Do you think, Subhuti, that the Tathagata knows any dharma as the ultimate and perfect enlightenment? Has the Tathagata ever set forth such a teaching?"

Subhuti replied: "Not according to my understanding of the teachings of the Tathagata. Why? The dharma which the Tathagata fully knows and has set forth can neither be thought nor formulated in words, for it is neither dharma nor adharma."

## Merit is non-merit

"What do you think, Subhuti," Buddha asked, "if a man or woman filled a thousand million worlds with the seven treasures and made a gift of them to the Tathagata, would they accumulate inestimable merit?"

Subhuti answered: "The merit accrued would be beyond reckoning. Why? Because the Tathagata has taught that such merit is non-merit."

## **One who has entered the stream**

"What do you think, Subhuti," Buddha asked, "does a one who has entered the stream which flows to enlightenment, say 'I have entered the stream'?"

"No, Buddha", Subhuti replied. "For he has won no dharma and therefore he is called one who has entered the stream. No objects of sight or hearing have been won, no smells or tastes, no objects of touch nor even objects of mind. Thus he is called one who has entered the stream. If the thought 'the fruit of entering the stream has been attained by me' occurred to such a one, then he would be seizing upon a self, or personality, a soul or a concept of being."

## **One who must return once**

Buddha asked: "Subhuti, do you think that one who has to return but once again, even entertains the thought 'the fruit of a once-returner is mine'?"

"No Buddha," Subhuti replied. "For nothing ultimately real has won the status of a once-returner: that is why he is called once-returner."

## **One who will not return**

"Do you think", Buddha asked, "that the one who will not return at all, ever thinks 'the fruit of the never-returner is mine'?"

"No, Buddha," Subhuti answered. "For nothing which can be considered ultimately real has won the status of never-returner'."

## **One who is fully enlightened**

"Then," Buddha asked, "does the fully enlightened one, ever think, 'full enlightenment is mine'?"

"Indeed not," Subhuti answered, "for nothing ultimately real is called fully enlightened, and that is why one who is fully enlightened is called fully enlightened. If one who is fully enlightened ever thought 'the fruit of being fully enlightened is mine', he would grasp a self, a personality, a soul or a concept of being."

## **Dharma is non-dharma**

"Do you think, Subhuti," Buddha then asked, "there is any dharma or attainment which the Tathagata acquired from the fully enlightened one?"

"No, not one," Subhuti replied.

## Perfection is non-perfection

Buddha said: "If a Bodhisattva declared 'I perfect serene [Buddha-fields](#)', his words would be false. Why? Because the Tathagata has taught that the perfection of serene Buddha-fields is non-perfection. Thus the Tathagata speaks of serene Buddha-fields.

"The Bodhisattva should develop a thought which is in no way dependent upon sights, sounds, smells tastes, tactile sensations or mental objects.

## Existence is non-existence

"Suppose, Subhuti, a man had an enormous body, like Sumeru, the king of mountains. Would the sense of personal existence he had also be enormous?"

"Yes, indeed, Buddha," Subhuti answered. "His sense of personal existence would be enormous. But the Tathagata has taught that personal existence is no-existence, for it is in fact neither existence nor non-existence. So it is called 'personal existence'."

## Summarize the teaching on dharma

Subhuti asked Buddha: "What is this teaching on dharma and how shall it be remembered?"

Buddha answered: "This teaching, Subhuti, is known as Prajnaparamita, the perfection of wisdom, and you should remember it as such. Yet the very discourse the Tathagata has taught as 'the perfection of wisdom' is exactly the teaching which is not the perfection of wisdom. Thus it is only *called* Prajnaparamita.

"Do you think, Subhuti, that the Tathagata has taught any special dharma?"

"No, Buddha," Subhuti answered, "not at all!"

## Interlude

Subhuti, hearing this discourse on dharma, understood it and was moved to tears. He spoke:

"Buddha! The teaching of the Tathagata regarding dharma is most precious. Through it, Buddha-cognition has arisen in me. Never have I witnessed such a teaching! Blessed are those who when this discourse is taught, have true perception. Yet true perception is in fact no perception, though the Tathagata teaches true perception.

"When this discourse on dharma is being taught, it is easy for me to accept and believe it. But in future days, when the teaching wanes, beings will listen to this teaching, retain it, ponder it, and illuminate it for others, and they will be blessed indeed. For in them no sense of self, no conception of an entity, no perception of personality, will exist. A sense of self is no sense, in truth, a conception of being is no conception, and a perception of personality is no perception. The Buddhas have transcended all perceptions!"

Buddha said: "It is as you say, Subhuti. Blessed indeed are those beings who do not tremble with fear or awe when they hear this teaching. The Tathagata has taught parama paramita, the supreme perfection. And this teaching of the Tathagata is also the teaching of countless Buddhas.

"Further, Subhuti, the perfection of patience taught by the Tathagata is in reality no perfection. Why? When the Raja of Kalinga mutilated my body, I had at that time no sense of self, no conception of a being, no perception of personality. If such a conception or perception had arisen at that time, anger and hatred would have arisen in me. But for five hundred lives I have been a sage suffused with patience, having no sense of self, no conception of being, no perception of personality.

## **Practice virtue**

"A Bodhisattva, once he has relinquished all perceptions, raises his thought to the enlightenment. He releases a thought free of form, sound, smell, taste, touch or mental activity, free even from dharma and adharma, for all such supporting conditions are in reality no support at all. Hence the Tathagata teaches: virtue should be practised by a Bodhisattva who relies on no supporting conditions.

"A Bodhisattva should practise virtue in this way for the welfare of all beings. And yet, the perception of a being, Subhuti, is no perception. All those beings just spoken of are in fact no beings. The Tathagata does not speak falsely, but rather speaks the truth, in accord with reality. Yet the dharma which the Tathagata has attained and now illuminates for others is neither real nor unreal.

## **Renouncing virtue**

"A Bodhisattva who is attached to conceptions and perceptions, and who renounces virtue, is like a man groping in the dark. A Bodhisattva who is free from conceptions and perceptions, and who renounces virtue, is like a man whose eyes see all things clearly in the bright morning sun."

## **Interlude 2**

Buddha said: "Those good men and women who will take up this teaching on dharma, who will think on it, recite it, study it, and who will illuminate the whole of it for others, they are known to the Tathagata. He recognizes them by his Buddha-cognition and perceives them with his Buddha-eye. These good beings will each bring to fruition immeasurable and incalculable merit.

"I recollect through my Buddha-cognition, Subhuti, that in the remote past, aeons before the supremely enlightened one, I faultlessly served millions of Buddhas throughout incalculable ages. Nevertheless, the merit gained by those who take up, remember, study, recite and explain to others this discourse in the future, when the way is obscured, will surpass the merit gained in the service I rendered to all Buddhas millions of times over. Their merit has no number; it is incalculable and incomparable.

"If I were to teach just how vast this merit which will be gained in the future is, Subhuti, good men and women who hear me would become confused, mentally disturbed and even frantic. But since the Tathagata has taught that this discourse on dharma is inconceivable, an incommensurable karmic fruit should be expected from it."

## **Lead all beings to nirvana 2**

Subhuti asked: "How, Buddha, does one who seeks the Bodhisattva Path tread it?"

Buddha answered: "One who sets out on the Bodhisattva Path should continuously think, 'I must lead all beings to absolute Nirvana; nevertheless, even when all beings have been led to Nirvana, no being in reality has been led to Nirvana.' For if the idea of a being, entity or personality should arise in him, he is not a Bodhisattva. He who has set out on the Bodhisattva Path is not one of the dharmas.

"Do you think, Subhuti, that when the Tathagata was with the enlightened one there was any dharma by which he came to know supreme enlightenment?"

"There was not," Subhuti answered, "any dharma by which the Tathagata has known supreme enlightenment."

"For this reason," Buddha said, "'Tathagata signifies attributelessness, and if someone were to say, 'The Tathagata has fully known supreme enlightenment. The dharma of the Tathagata is neither real nor unreal. Hence the Tathagata teaches that all dharmas are the Buddha's own special dharmas. Why? The Tathagata has taught that all dharmas together are no dharma named 'Bodhisattva'?"

"No, Buddha," Subhuti answered.

"Thus," Buddha continued, "the Tathagata teaches that all dharmas are selfless and are not beings, entities or personalities. Even if a Bodhisattva wished to create tranquil Buddha-fields, he should not be called a Bodhisattva, for the Tathagata has taught that tranquil Buddha-fields are not really tranquil Buddha-fields.

"Subhuti, the Bodhisattva who continually swells on the selflessness of all dharmas, however, is known by the Tathagata, the supremely enlightened one, as a Bodhisattva of Great Courage."

## **What does the tathagata see?**

Buddha asked Subhuti: "What do you think? Does the Tathagata possess the physical eye?"

"Yes, Buddha," Subhuti replied.

"Does the Tathagata possess the divine eye of enlightenment?"

"Surely, Buddha, the Tathagata possesses it."

"Does the Tathagata possess the eye of transcendental wisdom, Subhuti?"

"Indeed he does, Buddha."

"Does the Tathagata possess the dharma eye?"

"Yes, Buddha."

"And, Subhuti, does the Tathagata possess the Buddha-eye of universal compassion?"

"Without doubt, Buddha, the Tathagata possesses all these eyes."

## **Comments on the mind**

"Subhuti, I know the mind of every sentient being in all the host of universes, regardless of any modes of thought, conceptions or tendencies. For all modes, conceptions and tendencies of thought are not mind. And yet they are called 'mind'. Why? It is impossible to retain past thought, to seize future thought and even to hold present thought."



## **Form is no-form**

"Is the Tathagata to be seen," Buddha asked, "in the manifestation of his form?"

"Indeed not," Subhuti replied, "for the Tathagata has taught that the manifestation of his form is no manifestation, even though it is called 'the manifestation of his form'."

The Buddha said: "Does the Tathagata think, 'I have demonstrated dharma'? If anyone says, 'The Tathagata has demonstrated dharma', he speaks falsely, for he misunderstands the Tathagata by grabbing at what is not there. There is no dharma which could be taught as a demonstration of dharma."

## **Being is non-being**

Subhuti asked: "in the distant future when the way is obscured, will there be beings who, upon hearing these dharmas, will believe them?"

"Subhuti," Buddha replied, "they would be neither beings nor non-beings, for the Tathagata has taught that beings are not in truth beings, even though he has called them 'beings'."

## **Summary of dharma**

"Do you think, Subhuti," Buddha asked, "there is any dharma by which the Tathagata has known supreme enlightenment?"

"There is no such dharma, Buddha."

"Thus, Subhuti, no atom of dharma is to be found. Therefore, enlightenment is called supreme. This dharma is identical only with itself, and is undifferentiated. Therefore it is called 'supreme enlightenment'. Being unique and undifferentiated because of the absence of a self, entity or personality, this supreme enlightenment is known as the collectivity of all good dharmas. But Subhuti, the Tathagata has taught that dharmas are not in truth dharmas, even though they are called 'dharmas'."

"Does a Tathagata ever think, 'I have liberated beings'? Never imagine this, Subhuti, for there is no being to be liberated by the Tathagata. If the Tathagata thought to liberate any being, a concept of self, entity or personality would have arisen in him. The Tathagata has taught that the concept of self is no concept. Nevertheless, common people cling to the concept of self. The Tathagata has taught that the common people are not common people, even though they are called 'common people'."

Who sees me by form, Who sees me in sound, Perverted are his footsteps upon the way;  
For he cannot perceive the Tathagata. The Buddhas are seen through dharma, From  
dharma-bodies their guidance comes; But the nature of dharma is never discerned, It cannot  
be grasped by the mind alone.

## Examples of misinterpretation

The Buddha said: "No one should say, 'Those who set out upon the Bodhisattva Path presume the annihilation of a dharma', for it is not so, Subhuti. Those who tread the Bodhisattva Path do not presume the annihilation of any dharma.

"Suppose, Subhuti, that a man or woman filled with the seven treasures as many galaxies as there are grains of sand in the great Ganges, and then offered them all to the Tathagatas; and suppose a Bodhisattva patiently forbore all dharmas, which in themselves have no essence. This Bodhisattva would gain an immeasurably greater merit. And yet a Bodhisattva should gain no merit."

"But would not, Buddha," Subhuti asked, "a Bodhisattva gain much merit?"

"He would gain it, Subhuti, but he should not grasp it."

Buddha continued: "If anyone says that the Tathagata comes or goes, sits or reclines, he fails to understand my teaching. Why? The Tathagata has neither whence nor whither, and therefore he is called the supremely enlightened one'.

"If a man or woman took a galaxy for every particle of dust in this vast galaxy and thoroughly ground each one until it was reduced to atoms, would the heap of atoms be great?"

"Indeed, Buddha," Subhuti answered, "the heap of atoms would be immense. And yet this enormous heap of atoms is not really a heap of atoms, even though it is called 'a heap of atoms'.

"Further, although the Tathagata has said 'galaxy', he teaches that it is not in truth a galaxy. For, Buddha, if there were in truth a galaxy, it would be a material object to be seized upon, and the Tathagata has taught that there is no seizing at all."

"Indeed, Subhuti," Buddha said, "this 'seizing upon a material object' is a convention of language, an expression devoid of real content. It is neither dharma nor adharma, even though ordinary people have seized upon it foolishly.

"Suppose, Subhuti, that someone said that the Tathagata has taught a conception of a self, an entity or a personality. Would he be right?"

Subhuti answered: "Not at all, Buddha. That which the Tathagata has called 'a conception of self' is no conception."

"Therefore, Subhuti," Buddha said, "one who has set out on the Bodhisattva Path should know all dharma and view them intently. Yet he should know them and view them in a way which does not give rise to a perception of any dharma. Why? The Tathagata has taught that perception of a dharma is no perception, even though it is called 'perception of a dharma'.

## Conclusion

"If even a Bodhisattva of Great Courage filled innumerable galaxies with the seven precious treasures, and offered them as a gift to the supremely enlightened ones, his merit would not compare with the immeasurable merit of a good man or woman who took just one stanza from this Prajnaparamita discourse on dharma and remembered, recited, studied and illuminated it for others. How is this done? In a way which is free from appearances. Thus one illuminates it for others."

Like a meteor, like darkness, as a flickering lamp, An illusion, like hoar-frost or a bubble,  
Like clouds, a flash of lightning, or a dream: So is all conditioned existence to be seen.

Thus spoke Buddha.